

## HYSTERICAL ACCUSATIONS: AN ANALYSIS OF THE EMMA BOND CASE.

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**H**YSTERICAL accusations against physicians are so far from being infrequent, that a recent little poem in *Punch* speaks of living hysterical scandals "down" in a way which denotes that such scandals are a necessary concomitant of a medical man's life. That laymen should also suffer from such scandals is to be expected, although from the circumstances of the case they do not suffer as frequently as physicians. The recently decided well-known case of Emma Bond seemed to me one of this character, and I have thought the same of sufficient importance to merit analysis. The *British Medical Journal* says: "Recent circumstances, in the case of Lady Florence Dixie, have directed attention to certain remarkable delusions to which females of unstable nervous equilibrium are subject, either through hysteria or through similar disorders of the nervous system. Charcot and Bourneville give instances of the extraordinary self-deceptions that are frequent among hysterical patients. Dr. Legrand du Saulle, physician to the Salpêtrière, Paris, describes ('Les Hystériques'<sup>1</sup>) some remarkable cases of delusions, where females labored under the belief that they had been struck or stabbed by others, even after having inflicted blows and wounds upon themselves. In one instance a young woman was found by her husband lying on the floor of her room in a fainting-fit, her

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<sup>1</sup> Volume i., 1883.

face covered with blood. On reviving from her swoon she stated that she had been attacked by armed men; the Paris newspapers related the case, and within three weeks two similar events occurred in the French metropolis. All these cases proved to be fabricated by the supposed victims. A young girl wounded herself slightly with a pistol. She gave the police authorities the most minute details about an imaginary assassin, who, according to her account, fired the weapon, but she was found to be highly hysterical, and it was proved that she had wilfully wounded herself. In a third case in Dr. du Saulle's experience, a young woman was found in a railway carriage, stabbed in the left side. The incident caused great excitement, but it was proved, contrary to her assertions, that she had inflicted the wound herself, and was a hysterical subject. A housemaid was found lying behind a door, bound, gagged, and covered with bruises. She stated that she had been brutally attacked by two burglars with blackened faces, but she was a highly hysterical woman, and there appears to have been strong evidence that she had contrived to tie her own hands, and to gag and bruise herself. Perhaps the strangest case of all occurred in M. Tardieu's practice. A young lady, living at Courbevoie, wished to make herself an object of public interest by passing as a victim of a political conspiracy, which she pretended to have discovered. One night she was found in a state of the greatest mental perturbation at the door of her apartment. She could not talk, but stated in writing that she had been attacked outside her own house by a man, who had attempted to garrote her, at the same time striking her twice with a dagger. Only the lady's clothing was injured, and the body of her dress and her corset were found to be cut through, but at different levels. She tried to make out that the attempt at strangulation had caused dumbness. M. Tardieu remarked in her hearing that this infirmity rapidly disappeared when produced under circumstances of this kind. She soon managed to regain her speech, and in a short time admitted that the whole narrative had been evolved out of her inner consciousness. Eccentricity in relatives is ever strongly presumptive of

self-deception when a female makes any statement or charges of any kind. The constant fear of assassination, especially if based on reasonable grounds, is particularly liable to predispose nervous or excitable subjects to extraordinary delusions of this kind."

These accusations, however, have sometimes very serious results. In a case reported by Legrand du Saulle,<sup>1</sup> an hysterical female sent five persons to Cayenne (the French penal settlement) by accusing them of outrage. A member of the French Medico-Psychological Association suspected from an after examination of the alleged victim that the whole story was of hysterical origin, and through his efforts the innocence of the prisoners at Cayenne was demonstrated, and they were released from their unmerited confinement.

Toulmouche<sup>2</sup> has reported the case of a young girl given to devotional exercises and much inclined to flagellation and asceticism. She one day cut herself with a pair of scissors 600 times on various parts of the body. She asserted these wounds were made by a man who tried to outrage her. She finally confessed that the injuries were all self-inflicted.

Huchard<sup>3</sup> has had under observation an eighteen-year-old girl who accused the vicar of the parish of having raped her. She stated that one day while she was praying in the church the vicar shut all the doors and requested her to go with him into the sacristy. There, she said, he made obscene proposals to her and as she indignantly refused he pointed a dagger at her; she fainted, and during the faint he (she alleged) violated her. She was questioned during the trial, and her replies to the questions of the medical experts exciting suspicion, an examination was ordered by the court which showed that she had never been violated and was still a virgin.

Tardieu<sup>4</sup> has had under observation the case of an inmate of a Gascony convent who claimed to have been made the victim of all sorts of outrages therein. Her father, with full faith in what she said, denounced the alleged criminals.

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<sup>1</sup> "Les Hystériques."

<sup>2</sup> *Annales d'Hygiène Publique*, série i, tome i., 1853.

<sup>3</sup> *Archives de Neurologie*, March to April, 1882.

<sup>4</sup> "Étude Médico-légale sur la Folie."

Finding, however, that his daughter's story was untrue, he took his life. In another case cited by Tardieu a girl charged two young men with having violated her person and introduced into her rectum and vagina, stones, pieces of wood and iron, which had to be extracted with great pain. She had convulsive seizures followed by paralysis. The two young men were convicted, and had been imprisoned for more than a year when the false nature of the accusation was discovered.

Hammond<sup>1</sup> reports the case of a twenty-two-year-old girl who carried on a systematic course of deception for several months, and not only greatly injured an excellent young man but damaged her own character to such an extent that her family were compelled to move away from the place in which they were living. In this instance the patient, by wearing pads over her abdomen and gradually increasing their thickness, led to inquiry from her mother and suspicions that an abdominal tumor existed. It was decided to consult an eminent gynecologist, when the girl, with tears, lamentations, and self-reproaches, confessed that she was pregnant. Of course the distress in the family was very great, and a great deal of anger was exhibited toward the supposed miscreant who had ruined a virtuous woman. For a long time she refused to reveal the name of her seducer; but finally one morning she came down stairs with a letter she had written to her father in which a full (but false) revelation of all the circumstances was made. In this letter she declared that a gentleman they all knew and respected was the seducer. Arrangements for her confinement were made in a distant city and at the same time it was resolved by her parents to arrange, if possible, a marriage with the alleged destroyer of their daughter's honor. The father, accordingly, had an interview, at which the gentleman was offered the alternative of immediate marriage or instant death. Denials and protestations were useless. He consented to the marriage, but only on condition that he should be granted an interview with the lady in presence of her parents. This was agreed to. A meeting took place at once, and the gentleman, who was

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<sup>1</sup> "Treatise on Insanity."

a lawyer, succeeded by his tact and directness of his questions in exposing the fraud and obtaining a full confession.

It will be obvious that hysterical females are capable of deceiving a whole community. On examining the evidence in the Bond case it is found that the first accusation made was vague and indefinite, and that only as suspicion pointed to certain persons did the charges of Miss Bond become direct and positive. Her testimony as a whole was so contradictory that the jury threw it out of consideration. The prosecution failed to place the physicians, who examined Miss Bond after the alleged outrage, upon the stand. The defence claimed that they had the right to cross-examine these physicians, but this claim was not allowed. Turning to the family history, it is found that there are insane and eccentric members in the Bond family; it is also to be noted that, during the period between the time of the alleged outrage and the trial, whenever public interest in the case began to abate, Miss Bond had hysterical convulsions, and was on the "point of death" so frequently that the newspapers commented on her tenacity of life. It is also to be noted that Miss Bond had herself photographed, and this photograph sold to defray the expenses of the prosecution; her only claim to public notice being the fact that she was outraged. Taking into account the indefinite and contradictory nature of Miss Bond's earlier accusations, her craving for public notice as shown in her sale of her photographs, her convenient hysterical convulsive attacks at periods when interest in the case was abating, the significant non-use of medical testimony by the prosecution, the existence of neurotic relatives, but one conclusion can be drawn: the whole charge was the product of a diseased brain which imposed on a scandal-loving community. The jury who found the prisoners innocent in the face of public clamor are to be congratulated on their intelligence and sense of justice. Had they had less firmness the story would have been the same as that which recently drove Dr. Edwardes to suicide; the same inconsistent mob, which gloated over his alleged crime, drove the poor hysterical female, whose delusion gulled them through their tendency

to believe scandal, from the town on discovering the unjust nature of the accusation. Hysterical girls who make these accusations are not responsible for them, but the scandal-loving people who support them in these should be held pecuniarily responsible. But for the good sense of a physician in Indiana there would have been a repetition of the Bond case there; a girl made like accusations, but he showed that these were of purely hysterical origin. It is to be regretted that Miss Bond did not fall into the hands of a similar sensible physician soon after the alleged outrage. In that case this poor girl's affliction would not have been made the property of the public.